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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building

Statement submitted by International Federation of Business and Professional Women and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; Associated Country Women of the World, Centre for Women, the Earth, the Divine, European Union of Women, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, National Council of German Women's Organization, Salvation Army and Socialist International Women, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2004/1.

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We, the undersigned international and national non-governmental organisations in consultative status with ECOSOC, members of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Status of Women, present to the 48th session of CSW the following statement for information and consideration.

In times of conflict, humanitarian action involves protecting people in the field of war, but in recent years this has become even more complex as it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between humanitarian, political and military intervention. Decisions on military intervention should be taken by the UN Security Council, and be carried out within the framework of international law.

Women continue to have little access to protection and assistance, as humanitarian aid often fails to reach them. Humanitarian action must address the specific needs of women, particularly in relation to their physical and psycho-social care. The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war leaves women traumatised and has also contributed to the spread of sexually transmitted infections, notably HIV/AIDS.

We note that 80% of the world's refugees are women and children and 90% of war victims are now civilians, mainly women and children, and that a wide spectrum of studies demonstrate that the mobilisation of male soldiers - both in warring factions and as peacekeepers - contributes to the growth of prostitution around military bases and army camps, subsequently increasing child prostitution, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

Conflict prevention and conflict resolution by other than military means are therefore more urgent than ever. It is therefore essential that women be included in analysis, policy making and negotiations since they are more likely than men to be prepared to open and maintain a dialogue and to try new paths, and since women are not locked into classical confrontational behaviour.

Until now women's participation in formal peace processes has been limited. That is why the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security is so essential.

We commend the UN Secretary General for nominating Ms Jane Holl Lute to the position of Assistant Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations and welcome the successful efforts of the UNHCR to tailor its work to the needs of women refugees.

We welcome the entry into force of both the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the supplementary Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. These legally binding instruments are important tools, in particular in conflict and post-conflict situations. They will help to protect the victims and combat trafficking in persons - especially women and children.

Assuring stability and human security is the first step in reconstructing a country or region after conflict. The equal participation of women in all stages of peace negotiations and reconciliation processes must be ensured. After the end of a conflict men often grant themselves work and other opportunities in society and take the lead in rebuilding their community. Women need to be given equal opportunities to take part in the rebuilding of their community.

We, the undersigned NGOs,

call for the improvement of judicial systems through the strengthening of procedures and mechanisms for the reporting, investigation, prosecution and ending of violence against women in war situations and other conflicts, as well as the recognition of rape as a war crime which must be subject to prevention, pursuit and punishment by national and international justice;

urge carefully balanced reporting on armed conflict and in so doing advance an objective and human picture, in contrast to the widespread bellicose and biased presentation of such conflicts;

call for the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons, with special attention paid to women and girls in order to address their specific needs and ensure equal access to humanitarian assistance;

reiterate that persecution based on gender should be considered a reason for granting asylum;

stress that medical and psycho-social support for women and girls who are sexually abused in conflict and post-conflict periods must be guaranteed as a priority intervention;

call on the UN Secretary General to increase the number of women in peace-related functions such as Special Representatives and Envoys, beginning with a minimum of 30%. The prevention of widespread rape and assault of women and girls should be a priority in the context of intervention by the United Nations. Effective measures should be taken to avoid and prevent such abuses in all international and regional conflicts;

strongly request the involvement of women in peace keeping, in preventive diplomacy and in all stages of peace mediation and negotiation.